

Live a Life of Joy

Pt. 2: How to Build a Joyful Relationship

Philippians 2

The overall theme of this sermon series is "Living a Life of Joy." In chapter 2 we have a couple of examples of joyous relationships.

Paul talks with fondness of his relationship with Timothy and describes it as a father-son type of relationship.

Timothy has a joyous relationship with those in Philippi who are receiving this letter.

Paul also has a joyous relationship with a messenger from Philippi who's name is Epaphroditus.

And, like Paul and Timothy, Epaphroditus also has a joyous relationship with the church members in Philippi.

But the overriding relationship expressed throughout this letter is the joyous relationship between the Apostle Paul and the church members there in Philippi.

Look at a few key verses that reveal the character of their relationship.

Look at the end of verse 19

Philippians 2:19 "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you."

Look at three key words at the beginning of verse 12

Philippians 2:12 "...my dear friends..."

Go back to chapter 1 and look at verses 3-4

Philippians 1:3-4

3 I thank my God every time I remember you.

4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray, with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Look at the first half of verse 7

Philippians 1:7 "It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart...."

And then in the following verse

Philippians 1:8 "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."

And then, jump back to chapter 4 verse 1

Philippians 4:1 "Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown...."

Paul and the church members in Philippi had a joyous relationship.

How did they build this joyous relationship?
I think the key is found in some very profound verses, right in the middle of this chapter.

Philippians 2:5-8

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!

First of all, the Apostle Paul says that you should be like Jesus.

1. Be like Jesus.

Now, does that sound a little far fetched? I mean, after all:

He's God, and we're not.

He's perfect, and we're not.

He's divine, and we're not.

He never sinned, and we can't stop sinning.

So, how in the world are we going to be like Jesus.

And yet, Paul says that our attitude should be like Jesus:

Philippians 2:5 "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Do you call yourself a Christian?

The word "Christian" means "Christ-one" Or, one like Christ.

We ARE supposed to be like Jesus.

At least, we're supposed to try to be like Him.

Jesus Himself gave us that example:

John 13:4-5

4 Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

So here is Jesus, whom the Bible describes as the "fullness of deity in bodily form," doing the job that a common household slave would normally do.

Here is the Incarnation of God washing the stinky, smelly, filthy, calloused feet of a bunch of men who have been traipsing around the country side in old worn out sandals.

But just as profound as that, Jesus expects YOU to have that same exact attitude! Continue on in that same chapter:

John 13:12-15

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.

13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am.

14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Jesus challenges us to a lifestyle of self denial.
Jesus challenges us to stop focusing on "I" and "me" and "mine" and instead to focus on others.

Think about this for a minute, can you imagine the impact upon all of your relationships, if you were just a little more like Jesus?

- What would it do to your marriage if you were just a little more Christlike?
- How would it impact your role as a parent if your attitude was more like Jesus?
- What would your friends think if they saw Jesus in you on a more consistent basis?

Joy in your relationships begins with a Christlike attitude in your relationships.

2. Abandon your "rights."

We live in a society which places a great emphasis upon our rights.
In our world popular phrases are things like self-fulfillment, self-expression, self-actualization.

There's even a woman's magazine whose title is simply the word "Self."

Robert J. Ringer wrote a book, "Looking Out for Number One." It was the best-selling book in America for 46 consecutive weeks.

The truth is, we are somewhat a narcissistic society.
More often than not, we are consumed with self.
Everybody wants to demand their rights.

Certainly you can imagine the negative impact such attitudes have on relationships?

But then Jesus enters our world, He does just the opposite.
Look again at our key verses:

Philippians 2:5-7

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness

Wow! Incredible. It says that Jesus made himself nothing. He took the nature of a servant. Not a king. Not a prince. Not a celebrity. A servant!

Furthermore, Paul says we should do the same.

But that just doesn't come natural to us, does it?

Give up my rights? Deny myself? You've got to be kidding!

And yet there's no getting around it.

Paul specifically says "Your attitude should be the same as Jesus"

Are there any benefits to doing such a thing? Could this possibly improve relationships? Can this lead to joyous relationships?

An unknown author wrote the following, "In the pursuit of self-gratification, one finds himself enslaved. It is freedom to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way. Because the obsession we have to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest things that hold us in bondage. We can spend weeks, months, even years in a perpetual stew because some little thing did not go like we wanted.

"We can fuss and fume. We can get mad about it. We can act as if our very lives hang on some trivial issue. Most often, we can't stand to give in for the stupid and simple reason that it will mean we will not get our own way. Self-denial frees us to drop the matter. Only in self-denial are we free to bring these demons to a place where they no longer control us."

After all, it was Jesus who said,

Matthew 16:24 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Denying yourself actually frees you up to enjoy more meaningful and deeper relationships....and thus, ultimately.....more joyous relationships.

Here's a suggestion: **Remember the phrase, "It's not about me!"**

The world doesn't revolve around you and your relationships shouldn't be all about you, either.

Can you imagine the impact upon your relationships if your "rights" weren't a consideration?

Most people would be totally blown away if you started putting them before yourself.

(I certainly understand that there are a few exceptions here in this room. Some of you are already consistently putting others first. But you are indeed the exception, and not the norm)

When you abandon your rights, when you stop demanding your rights, when you move beyond yourself, you are going to have much, much better relationships. You will be free to experience joy at an entirely different level

But there's more, still!

3. Put others first.

Here's the key to the whole thing.
Jesus didn't stop at just abandoning His own rights.
Jesus didn't just leave heaven.
He didn't just deny Himself.
It's more than just an act of self-deprecation.
He took it a step further.

It wasn't just about denying Himself, it was denying Himself SO THAT he could put others first. It starts with denying yourself, but it doesn't end there!

There are two steps:

1. Yourself - Deny yourself
2. Others - Put others before yourself

Look at our last key verse:
Philippians 2:8 "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!"

He didn't need to go to the cross for Himself.
We needed Him to go to the cross for us.
He didn't have to go to the cross because He did anything wrong.

He went to the cross to take our punishment upon Himself because of all the wrongs we have done. He put us first.

The Apostle Paul instructs that we are to live the same way:
1 Corinthians 10:24 "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others."

Jesus put others first. That's what we are supposed to do, too.

What would that do to your relationships?
What kind of impact would all of your relationships have if you put others before yourself?

- How many arguments would be avoided?
- How many hurt feelings would be avoided?
- How many conflicts would never even occur?
- How many tears would not need to be shed?
- How many relationships would not have been broken?

One of the ways to build better relationships is to focus far less upon yourself and far more on others. Be like Jesus. Abandon your “rights.” Put others first.

When you do that, you are actually being like God.

Remember the old saying, “To err is human, to forgive is divine.”

Forgiveness is just one of many acts of putting others first. Another is the act of giving people your time. Time is a precious commodity. When you spend time with someone, you are making a statement. It shows that you value that person.

And that has to start in you marriage and with your children. If you are married, you just have to invest time in your marriage. Love your marriage enough, love your spouse enough, to spend time together. Strong marriages are the result of couples investing time and emotion in each other.

Investing time with your children is also critical. There simply are no shortcuts to good parenting. Time investment is an absolute necessity.

I am going to share a part of a letter I received from a gentleman who I have been conversing with this week. I share this with you at his request. He shares this out of the depth of incredible grief. Approximately two weeks ago his 27 year old daughter was murdered. Natalie had been a part of our youth group about 10 years ago. The following is just a small part of an email he sent me as a follow up to other discussions. It is very relevant, it is very poignant to our discussion:

“Don, I had stuck on my calendar last week an outlook reminder to get a “Dad and Daughter” date set up with Natalie. That one will now have to wait until we see each other in heaven, and she reaches out her hand from the Light...

It may already be an encouraged tradition in the families at CCFH, and it would mean a lot to me if you **communicate with** your **fellow** congregation Dads, encouraging them to schedule on their busy calendars a special “Dad and Daughter” date. Tell each Dad, on my behalf, that during their date he should hug his daughter and tell her how much he loves and appreciates her specialness and talents, and that she is truly a “gift of God” to him and her mother. If she has already trusted her life to her Lord Jesus Christ, tell her how very much that means to him, and if not yet, how much he is looking forward to that day. Tell the Dads to tell their daughters that “instead of flowers,” this date is dedicated to “Natalie **and her loving Dad.**” Tell them to be sure to get a picture

taken (and PS, tell the Dad's to also loosen up that credit card and encourage Mom to also schedule a special "Mom and Daughter" shopping date, "dedicated to Natalie and her loving Mom."). I will look forward to hearing from you all, when you tell me how it turns out – may God specially bless the sowing and watering and may He continue to bring a great CCFH harvest in Jesus' Name."

Let me conclude my saying,
Don't wait until you are standing over a casket to express your love and appreciation to a loved one.
Don't let it take a funeral for you to find time in your schedule to spend some quality time with one you love.

Relationships can be a source of joy if we approach them with the right attitude.
If we'll look at others the way Jesus does.

Of all your relationships, there is none that can produce more joy than your relationship with your heavenly Father.
Of all your relationships, there is none that is more critical than your relationship with Jesus Christ.
Have you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior?